

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

October 18, 2005

The Honorable David L. Walker  
Comptroller General of the United States  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street N.W.  
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Walker:

As strong supporters of the Drug Free Communities program, we are requesting that the Government Accountability Office investigate the processes used to make decisions to award grants to community-based organizations under the Drug-Free Communities grant program during its fiscal year 2005 funding cycle. We are concerned that the new procedures that were implemented during the FY2005 funding cycle may have been unfair to existing grantees, that they may not have been given adequate information about the changes to the process, and that the process was not transparent to the grantees whose applications for continuing funding were denied. In addition, as part of the application process, ONDCP withheld funds from numerous existing grantees and notified them that they were placed into a high-risk status category and were at risk of losing their grants if they failed to provide certain documentation within 30 days of these notifications. We are concerned that these grantees had no prior indication that their projects were in such a status and that the process to determine that they were to be put on such status was not handled in a consistent or clear manner. These grantees therefore may have been unprepared to provide the documentation required to demonstrate that they were in compliance with federal guidelines.

Specifically, we request that you investigate and report to us on:

(1) The changes made to the process of awarding Drug-Free Communities grants between FY2005 and prior years. Specifically, we ask that you review: the standards, criteria, materials and content analysis that were used to assess grant applications and the extent to which these standards, criteria, materials and content analysis were consistent with the legislation of the Drug-Free Communities Act and the intent of the Congress; the use of peer-review scores in making final decisions about grant applications; the procedures used to select the members, the composition, and the role of the small group that reviewed the applications, the relationship between the group's decisions and the peer-review scores and the specific procedures, criteria, materials and content analysis used by the small group to make funding determinations and the number of grants they reviewed based on these procedures, criteria, materials and analysis; and other aspects of the FY2005 process that deviated from prior years' processes.

(2) The information provided to applicants (both in writing and at the Grant Application Workshops)— for both existing grantees and new applicants—about the new procedures, criteria, materials and content analysis that would be used to award new and continuing grants, as well as place existing grantees on high risk status and skip over highly rated new grantees for funding who exceeded the new 20% limit on direct services and the grantees' understanding of these procedures and the criteria and materials that would be analyzed to make funding decisions.

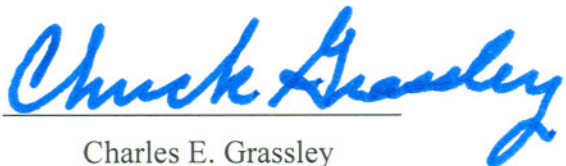
(3) The information provided to applicants that applied for continuing funding and that were denied funding about the reasons for the denial of their grant applications.

(4) For those grantees that had site visits from program officers, the outcome of the site visit assessment and its relationship to the decision to continue funding their grants. For all grantees that did not receive continuation funding, what information had their project monitors provided to them about the ongoing performance of their projects and how this information was used in making final grant application decisions.

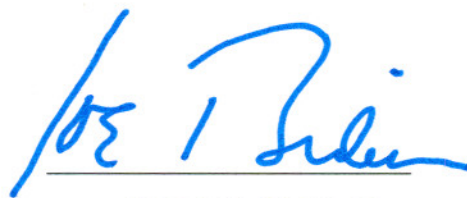
(5) Any information regarding the 10 eligibility criteria including what direction was given to the applicants regarding these criteria, whether the criteria were laid out clearly in one central location in the application, how the small group used these criteria to determine eligibility and why it was completed after peer review.

(6) Any correspondence between ONDCP and SAMHSA with regard to the Drug-Free Communities grant program.

If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Jeremy Mishler at (202) 224-9029, Marcia Lee at (202) 224-5606, Malia Holst at (202) 225-2577 or Hilarie Chambers at (202) 225-4961. Thank you in advance for your prompt response to this request.



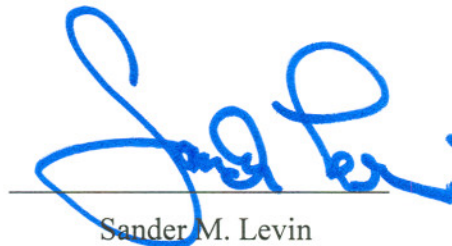
Charles E. Grassley



Joseph R. Biden, Jr.



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Sander M. Levin